

The Dread Lord of Essos

Chapter 22

Malaquo Maegyr held his head in his hands as he sat upon his large, throne-like chair that was high enough that there was no chance for his feet to touch the ground. As a Triarch, allowing his feet to touch the ground would be inconceivable. Unfortunately for him, he had greater problems at the moment.

Once again, the large palace that he was hunkered down in vibrated and shook violently. Dust rained down from the ceiling, coating the top of his head and turning it gray. In the distance, they heard the terrifying screech of an angry dragon.

"We told you, Malaquo! We told you to not antagonize him!" his fellow Triarch, Doniphos Paenymion yelled while shaking in fear.

"Yes, but you did not listen!" the third Triarch, Nyessos Vhassar snarled as he glared at the first.

The Triarchs of Volantis were elected by landowning freemen, regardless of gender, to rule throughout the year before another festive election took place. They were made up of two different parties, the Elephants and the Tigers. The Elephants were made of businessmen and merchants who wanted nothing more than to continue filling their coffers. The Tigers were made of the old aristocrats that were hungry for war and conquest. There had never been more than one Tiger serving at any given time.

The current Elephants, Doniphos and Nyessos, were being more than a little disingenuous. While they didn't push for war with Seven Swords, they did see the potential to earn a lot of coin if it could be conquered. At the very least, they hoped to harm trade within the city enough for them to figure out a long-term plan. It was not only that though. There were many in their party that were becoming steadily unhappy with how things were turning out. Seven Swords continued to blossom while their city wilted. It was clear that Seven Swords was the new financial powerhouse of the area while Volantis was relegated further down the line. Now that it was affecting their pocketbooks, the Elephants were willing to look the other way when it came to war. Suddenly, it seemed that they had bitten off more than they could chew.

Not caring that they weren't supposed to let their feet touch the ground, Nyessos got out of his chair and ran to the balcony doors. Flinging them open, he was forced to squint his eyes as the blinding sunlight battered his face. It took a moment for them to get used to the bright sun. As he blinked away the spots, he began looking around and up into the air. He was quickly followed by his Triarch brethren who also didn't care about tradition at the moment. They nearly fell over when hurricane-force winds suddenly slammed into them. All they saw was a massive, black wing fly by. Going to the railing, they looked to the left and saw the dragon flying by.

“Son of a whore!” Malaquo cursed. He had hired a small group of sellsword mercenaries to sneak into Seven Swords and poison the dragon with tainted mutton. He had hoped that if the dragon could be killed, or even taken out of action for a little while, then he could begin an invasion into the Dread Lord’s land and possibly siege his city. It appeared that the sellswords had failed their mission. They would know his displeasure if he managed to survive this catastrophe.

The dragon tilted to the side and avoided a large arrow fired from atop the city wall. Suddenly, the dragon’s head and neck straightened, and its throat seemed to inflate right before it opened its mouth. A stream of fire left its mouth, enveloping a section of the wall that housed three ballistae along with a guard house. They could have sworn that they heard the horrified screams of the burning. From their distance, it looked like little dots of fire falling from the wall, but they knew that those burning specks could only be the soldiers that were meant to protect them. They looked at each other and could see the sheer terror in their eyes. Down below, the panicked screams of the freemen could be heard. The Triarch wondered if the slaves below were screaming in fright, or celebrating their potential salvation. It was well known that the Dread Lord did not allow slavery on his land. Since the White City’s beginning, slaves from Volantis had begun taking every opportunity to escape. If they could make the long, dangerous trek through the Disputed Lands, they would inevitably win their freedom. It only made the slave-owners try that much harder to keep them in check, which only enhanced their desire for freedom. There was no doubt who the slaves would side with that day.

They watched the black, winged death circle back around before hitting the outer city wall with a fiery blast that felt like a thundershock. They nearly pissed themselves as a massive portion of their wall blew apart, sending horse-sized chunks of stone flying hundreds of feet in the air. The concussion of the blast shook the entire city. Even up high, their palace shook enough that they were forced to grab the railing so as to not fall over. “What are we going to do?!” Doniphos cried out, his hands shaking as sweat ran down the side of his face. Neither of his partners had an answer for him as an army of Unsullied began pouring through the breach in their city walls.

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Donned in his black, Valyrian Steel armor, Harry was the first to run through the devastated mess that was previously a massive stone wall. Using his magic, he jumped over the rubble instead of climbing over. He needed to give the Unsullied time to safely make their way across. In the distance, he could see a large force of the city’s guards, the Tiger Cloaks, charging at him. At their head was a giant war elephant topped with a large, wicker basket that held a dozen archers.

With his enhanced eyesight, he could see that they had tattoos of green tiger stripes across their cheeks. They wore chainmail shirts and had polished, silver helmets in the shape of tiger masks. As for weapons, they carried spears and had tiger claws jutting out from their gloved gauntlets. Harry could imagine that they would be a terrifying force to the inexperienced. Harry, however, was anything but. As the elephant ran closer, it arched its trunk high into the air and

trumpeted loudly. Harry held up his sword where it burst into flames. He could feel the vibrations in the ground as the beast was only a few dozen feet away. Harry reared his sword back, and with an overhead throw, launched the blade at the monstrous beast. The sword flew end-over-end and embedded itself right into the elephant's forehead. With a pitiful cry, the elephant tumbled over painfully and slid across the ground. The straps securing the basket snapped, sending the men inside tumbling overboard. Some hit the ground and were crushed by the sliding beast, some hit the road where they groaned painfully, and some slammed into the sides or corners of buildings, surely breaking many bones. Harry magically summoned his flaming sword back into his hand just as his Unsullied ran past him, screaming out a warcry.

To his side, he saw the wide eyes of disbelieving slaves that were chained to the sides of buildings. Going over, he easily cut the chains and freed the men and women so that they could run to safety. With that done, he went and joined his men.

Harry turned to the side, narrowly missing a spear thrust. Continuing to spin, he brought his sword down and removed the arm of his would-be assailant. Before he could even scream in pain, a flying spear impaled his chest, and he fell over, clutching the wooden pole buried deep within him. Harry's body jerked as another thrown spear hit his armor. Sparks burst from the point of impact, but Harry could barely feel it. His armor was simply beyond what their cheap weapons could handle. A spearless fighter stepped up and swung a long dagger at him, but he was easily able to block it with his armored forearm. The metal clang was brutal, and Harry heard the man cry out in pain as the knife fell from his hand. With a mighty swing, Harry's fist impacted his face, crushing the silver helm inward and knocking the man unconscious. Another man ran forward, but a front kick caved in his chest.

Two Tiger Cloaks pinned down one of his Unsullied and began repeatedly thrusting downward, stabbing him over and over. The Unsullied never even screamed as he died. Harry, however, took great offense. With a mighty swipe of his blade, their chainmail was sliced apart, and both of their exposed backs opened up. They arched their backs and screamed, reaching back to grab their gaping wounds.

His powerful senses drew his attention away from the sizzling wounds. Harry barely had time to grab one of the screaming men as arrows began to rain down upon him. His human shield grunted over and over as his body was peppered with arrows. The man's compatriot quickly dropped dead with an arrow sticking out of his eye socket. His Unsullied weren't spared either. Dozens dropped dead or injured as a force of dozens of men were firing down on them from the roof of a nearby building. Thankfully, it didn't last long.

One of the archers became confused when a shadow fell over him. Looking up, he was just able to scream as a wall of flames hit him and the building he was standing on. The Unsullied cheered as the top of the stone building became an inferno. Burning bodies hit the ground as the archers jumped to escape the fire. The Unsullied didn't bother killing them. They just let them burn.

Further and further the Unsullied pushed into the city. Harry freed as many slaves as he could along the way. Some slaves he didn't even need to free.

"Please, no! Stop!" Harry heard a man cry. To the side, two teenage children were viciously stabbing their master all over his body. The fact that their bodies were crisscrossed with whip scars didn't escape his notice. Off to the side, another slave was using her chain to strangle her mistress. As she dropped dead, Harry made sure to cut the young woman's chain and set her free.

As they reached Fishmonger's Square, the freemen were in an outright panic. Food and wares were scattered all over the ground as people grabbed what they could and ran for cover. It was here that more Tiger Cloaks attempted to hold the tide. Just beyond Fishmonger's Square was the Long Bridge that connected the newer, western portion of the city with the older, eastern part. The ruling class knew that the city would be in big trouble if they made it across the bridge, so the order was given to do whatever was necessary to keep it from happening. Even so, it was a fool's errand.

Spears of the Tiger Cloaks and Unsullied clashed in the square while chained slaves huddled off to the side. A female slave with a teardrop tattoo on her cheek screamed as an errant spear pierced her belly. Harry, meanwhile, was a madman. Arms, legs, and heads rolled as Fiendfyre made quick work of them. One young slave screamed in fright as Harry opened up a man's belly right in front of her. The fighter cried out as his entrails poured out of his belly and spilled on the ground. Harry heard the sound of retching as he moved on to another victim. Three men came at him at the same time, hoping to use greater numbers to take him out. Flinging out his hand, a blast of fire erupted from his palm, scorching their faces and setting their hair alight. He found it amusing to see them holding their faces while running around like chickens with their heads cut off. Seeing as their hair was on fire, he couldn't exactly blame them. They were quickly put down by his army.

Once again, when the warring armies were pushed further back, Harry took the time to free the chained slaves, allowing them to run to safety.

The gatewatcher watched with a hammering heart as the fighting got closer to him. It was his duty to seal the gateway in times of need. The gateway itself was a magnificent archway made of black stone that was carved with sphinxes, manticores, dragons, and many other legendary beasts. Wide open was a pair of massive oak doors that were over a foot thick. Each carried an artistically crafted, thin film of metal to decorate the doors as well as make them stronger. Like the archway, the metal depicted wild beasts of legend.

He drew in a ragged breath as a wave of Unsullied poured over the remaining Tiger Cloaks. Just then, the army parted for a man in black armor. In his hand was a flaming sword, and he was walking right for them.

“Close the fucking gate, you idiot!” he heard one of his fellow guards yell. With shaking hands, he silently nodded before remembering that he needed to give the order.

“Close the gate!” he yelled out, his voice cracking embarrassingly as he did so. The doors banged shut just as the dark warrior arrived. A group of twenty men hefted a thick plank of wood up and locked the gate shut from the inside. ‘That should buy us some time,’ the gatewatcher thought. Suddenly, a loud clang followed by a deep rattle made him look up to the gate. On the upper right, a flaming blade flashed between the wooden gate and the stone of the arch. He gasped in shock as the hinge broke free. A loud creaking of wood filled their area as the other five hinges were forced to hold up the extra weight. “Bring in some boards! Brace the gate!” he ordered as another hinge snapped free. He was shaking like a leaf as he waited. Finally, a group of his underlings carried in a large, thick board. They just started to try and brace the gate when one final hinge snapped. His men screamed as the upper right side began to tilt first. With a mighty groan, the gate came crashing down, killing the men trying to keep it from falling. The gatewatcher coughed and hid his face as dust and dirt were kicked up from the brutal collapse of the gate. Because of this, he never saw the Unsullied’s spear as it pierced his chest.

“Forward!” Harry ordered as they began marching down the Long Bridge. The Long Bridge crossed the river Rhoyme, connecting the western part of the city with the older, eastern section. The Bridge wasn’t very wide. The road was just wide enough to let two carts pass each other. Taking up most of the bridge’s space was a row of buildings on each side of the road. It was said that anything could be bought at the shops on the Long Bridge. As they marched up to the center of the bridge, they came across a wide collection of hands and heads that were prominently displayed. The hands belonged to thieves while the head belonged to executed criminals. They ignored the grizzly sight and moved forward. When they finally reached the second gateway, Harry just summoned his magic and blew the gate off of its hinges. Screams filled the air as the tumbling gates crushed many in their path. When the dust settled, the last remaining force of Tiger Cloaks stood at the ready, spears pointed at them.

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“They’ve breached the second gate!” Nyessos called out as he looked on with his Myrrish spyglass. All three were breathing heavily as sweat drenched their satin robes. One building was burning, both of their gates were in shambles, a dragon was circling their palace, and the invading army was fighting their way to the Black Wall. How could things possibly get worse?

In their haste to protect themselves, they ordered their palace guards down to the Black Wall to defend Old Volantis to the last man. Only one guard remained, protecting the door to the room that they were in. A loud thunk made them look over. A muffled scream outside of the door confused them. Malaquo, being the bravest of the three, ran over to the door and opened it up. He gasped when he looked down and saw their servants stabbing their nearly-dead guard. They looked up at him with hatred and contempt. Getting up, they turned their kitchen knives on him. Malaquo screamed and turned tail. He only got a half dozen steps away before being tackled. His two fellow Triarchs watched in horror as their blades repeatedly pierced his body. A

blood-curdling cry of pain brought them out of their state of shock. The last image they had of their friend was the twisted expression of a man breathing his last, ragged breath. The two ran back to the balcony and slammed the doors behind them. One of them was smart enough to wrap a silk scarf tightly around the two door handles. Within seconds, they heard the servants cursing them as they desperately tried to open the doors. Thankfully for them, the scarf held the doors together firmly. Down below, the invaders finally reached the Black Wall.

Harry walked up to the massive, two hundred feet tall wall made of fused, black stone. He knew that the Valyrians had created this wall and likely infused their magic into it. Placing his palm against the stone, he let his magic flow through it. He could feel the magic of the wall. Only a stronger magic could break through. Holding his sword tightly, he pushed a large portion of his remaining magic into the blade. It burned white just as he drove the blade into the wall, right down to the hilt. Letting go of the sword, he watched as it continued to burn. The area around the sword started to glow and crack. A spiderweb of breaks began to form as they stood there and watched. As the cracks in the stone spread, they felt a tremble beneath their feet. They could hear the sound of stones snapping from the tremendous pressure of his magic. Every so often, a chunk of black rock would break off and plummet to the ground, forcing those around him to take a few steps back. When Harry began to hear a high-pitched whine, he walked up to the sword and pulled it from the wall. As he did, a large section of the wall immediately began crumbling. Everyone watched as elephant-sized slabs of stone crashed to the ground. The smart ones backed up even further until only Harry stood close. Once the last piece fell, there was a gap in the Black Wall at least thirty feet wide. Harry was the first to cross over into Old Volantis.

As he did, he was met by the last of their reserves. The slave soldiers were rightfully terrified. They had never faced a force like Harry's, let alone a dragon. He could see their hands and legs trembling as they stood there, ready to face him. The few Unsullied they had amongst their midsts stood tall and calm, unaffected by the terrifying display. It was the Unsullied who charged first. Harry parried the first spear and slashed high with his blade, opening up the dark-skinned man's neck. He moved on to the next as the man grabbed his neck while blood squirted from between his fingers. It didn't take long before his own Unsullied was at his side.

High above, the remaining two Triarchs were in a bit of trouble. The doors were being kicked behind them while their personal house slaves tried desperately to kill them. Looking through their spyglass, they saw what could only be described as a full-on slave revolt. Now that their chains were broken, they took the opportunity to repay the kindness that they had endured since childhood. Down below, the invaders were now at their doorstep.

A sudden roar made them both jump in fright as the winged beast flew by and strafed the top of the Black Wall, setting fire to the hundred or so archers that ran out to protect the city. "They're coming in!" Nyessos cried out. Sure enough, the door to their palace had been breached, and the Dread Lord charged in with his army at his back.

"What will we do?" he asked desperately.

Doniphos suddenly smiled at his friend and clapped him on the shoulder. "Fear not, friend. For I see sunny days ahead of us," he reassured the scared man. Nyessos smiled back and took a deep breath. Doniphos had always been the most intelligent of the three.

'Of course, he has a plan!' Nyessos thought happily. He turned to ask about the plan when Doniphos ran to the edge of the balcony and jumped off. In shock, Nyessos walked to the edge and looked down. The screaming ended when his friend hit the ground far below.

'That son of a whore!' Nyessos thought as the doors behind him blew open. Turning in fright, he began to piss himself when he finally came face-to-face with the Dragon King. He opened his mouth to beg and plead, but he was suddenly grabbed by his servants. Nyessos screamed as their kitchen knives slid handle-deep into his back, belly, and chest. He tried desperately to shield himself, only for his hands to be sliced up as well. The last thing he saw was the Dread Lord looming over him as the light in his eyes faded.